

## Message Text

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70

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DODE-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 INR-07 L-03

ACDA-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 SS-15 PRS-01 SP-02 USIA-06

TRSE-00 SAJ-01 EB-07 COME-00 /067 W

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R 251504Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7795

INFO USMISSION NATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 08271

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, NATO, BE

SUBJECT: INFRASTRUCTURE CEILING AUGMENTATION

REF: (A) STATE 183434, (B) STATE 209034

1. REGRET DELAY IN RESPONDING TO REF. A.

2. BELGIAN PROJECTED SPENDING ON NATO INFRASTRUCTURE WAS 857 MILLION BF IN 1975 AND ROSE TO 897 MILLION BF IN 1976. IN THE SAME PERIOD THE TOTAL BELGIAN DEFENSE BUDGET ROSE 17 PERCENT TO 56.6 BILLION BF (BRUSSELS A-52, MARCH 25, 1976).

3. WE HAVE REPORTED THE BUDGETARY PROBLEMS THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT FACES AND THE UNPOPULAR MEASURES IT HAS TAKEN TO HOLD DOWN OR CUT SPENDING, MOST RECENTLY IN BRUSSELS 7818, WHICH ADDRESSED THE NATO AEW ISSUE. ADDITIONALLY, THE BELGIAN FRANC HAS AGAIN COME UNDER PRESSURE IN RECENT WEEKS AND THE GOVERNMENT IS AIMING AT A BALANCED BUDGET IN 1977 IN ORDER TO PROTECT ITS CURRENCY. FOR THESE REASONS, WE ARE NOT SANGUINE THAT ANY APPROACH DESIGNED TO OBTAIN ADDITIONAL BELGIAN SPENDING ON AN INCREASED NATO INFRASTRUCTURE CEILING WOULD BE SUCCESSFUL AT THIS TIME. IN OUR ESTIMATE, BELGIUM IS APT TO TAKE THE POSITION OUTLINED IN PARA 2 REFTTEL A AT THE DECEMBER MINISTERIAL

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MEETING, I.E., IT WILL RECOGNIZE THE NEED FOR A

HIGHER CEILING, BUT WILL TRY TO POSTPONE ANY ADDITIONAL SPENDING IN THE HOPE THE ECONOMIC PICTURE WILL IMPROVE.

4. IN VIEW OF THE ABOVE, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE COURSE OF ACTION IN PARA 2 B REFTTEL A (AN EMBASSY BILATERAL DEMARCHE) WOULD PROVE EFFECTIVE. AS AN ALTERNATIVE, WE SUGGEST THAT (A) OTHER NATO ALLIES, WHICH ARE FURTHER UP THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY CURVE AND WHOSE CURRENCIES ARE NOT CURRENTLY UNDER PRESSURE, BE APPROACHED FIRST; AND (B) THAT THE PROPOSED INCREASE IN THE INFRASTRUCTURE CEILING BE TAILORED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO POSTPONE ANY ADDITIONAL SPENDING BY THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT (AND OTHERS IN A SIMILAR SITUATION) UNTIL IT IS BETTER ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE. WITH THESE SUGGESTIONS IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO OBTAIN THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT'S APPROVAL IN PRINCIPLE AT THE DECEMBER MINISTERIAL AND THUS NOT INCUR ITS COMPLETE OPPOSITION TO THE PROPOSAL. RENNER

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